



"HEIDI'S LAW"

Bill Number 6009

Introduced by:

Representative Kevin Elsenheimer

June 8, 2006

OUR BRIGHT AND SHINING STAR

Presented by:

Ann, Dan and Todd Steiner

Family of, Heidi Lynn Steiner



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Today is June 8, 2006 and I have just returned from placing flowers on Heidi's grave to mark the fifteenth anniversary of her death. Fifteen years ago tonight our daughter, Heidi Steiner, at age sixteen, was in a car crash along with her twelve year old brother. The crash was caused by a drunk driver that was driving with a suspended license, numerous drunk driving convictions, and also had killed another woman before he killed our daughter, Heidi, and injured our son, Todd. He was well known in this community for his drinking habits and previous arrests.

I would like to tell you about our loss and how the community has reacted to her death and the current arrest of Mr. Danny Buffman for First Offense Drunk Driving.

Heidi was such a caring and wonderful daughter. She had the most beautiful smile that everyone associated her with and she just loved life. She was very close to her family and her community. To my husband, she was known as, "Daddy's Princess."

When Heidi was five years old, she was blessed with a brother, "a very special brother." He had many health problems and required a lot of medical attention and is physically and mentally impaired. Heidi was, "Number one," in Todd's life, his best friend, a great inspiration and a wonderful role model for him. No matter what age she was, she always included her brother in her activities and taught her friends to be very accepting of special needs children. Heidi stimulated both his social and verbal growth. At her funeral many people commented about the close relationship that they had, that they were always together, and what an inspiration she was for Todd. After Heidi was killed, Todd would sit at our living room window and watch for his sister. He'd say, "Where go Heidi, Heidi soon?" and I'd have to say, "Todd, Heidi was killed and she has gone to Heaven." For a very long time Todd wondered where Heidi went and this has led to Todd still sitting in the dining room looking out our window, but now he doesn't ask about her, he just looks out. His life changed drastically since her death!

Heidi's education was important to her right from the first time she entered elementary school. Every year she was on the Honor Roll. In high school she was accepted to the National Honor Society for her outstanding grades in school, her leadership abilities, and her community involvement. Not only was she outstanding in those areas, she excelled in sports, being All Conference in basketball and volleyball, and she was also All State in track, the Shot Putt and the Discus. She was part of the band and attended numerous State Competitions, was selected to partake in the Region's Honor's Band that was traveling to Europe the summer of her death, participated in the yearly school musicals, student government, of which she was Vice President, and was an active member of SADD. She was active in church, and volunteered for many community events. Her name was well known and we were so proud to be her parents. In our community she was known as, "The bright and shining star." That is what is

written on her Tombstone. Her smile, her love of life and her willingness to help everyone is what Heidi will always be remembered for.

Heidi did not stop helping out her community at her death. After Heidi's death, a scholarship was given each year to a senior to help with their college expenses so that they could receive the education that they deserved. A sports complex was also built in her memory, along with other people that have passed away in this town. Each year we have The Heidi Steiner Memorial Track Meet that hosts sixteen schools. The money that is raised at each of the meets is used to enhance our facility. We have created one of the most beautiful complexes in the state. Heidi would be so proud to know that she has created this for the students of Bellaire.

Yes, a wonderful young lady was taken from us as a result of a horrible crash that was caused by a drunk driver with many previous convictions. During the court hearings, Mr. Buffman, the man that killed Heidi, showed no remorse for what he had done and didn't even admit that he had caused the crash. The people of our town were very angry along with many other people from around the state. Mr. Buffman was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to ten to fifteen years in prison, which he only served seven.

Time has passed, but this last fall Mr. Buffman was arrested for drunk driving again. We were notified of his arrest and told that because of the time that Mr. Buffman had spent in jail and his parole time, he was being charged as a first offender. The previous charges, being nine, and the two deaths that he was involved in were **NO LONGER ON HIS RECORD!** Ten years had passed and his record was wiped clean. Our family along with many people from our community and surrounding areas were furious! How could he be only charged with **FIRST OFFENSE DRUNK DRIVING** when he had numerous drunk driving charges and killed our daughter? That same day I met with the lawyers in Representative Elsenheimer's office and stated that we felt that this law was very unfair and that the law should be rewritten so that repeat offenders are kept off of the highways. They agreed with us and they were very willing to work with us. The day of Mr. Buffman's arraignment, our family along with many other supporters of the law change appeared in court. While we were in court we heard the prosecutor and the judge tell Mr. Buffman what a danger he is to our community. They both discussed his previous record but could not use them in his sentencing. They were as angry as we were that he was charged with only a first offense! A local television station sent a news reporter to cover the arraignment of Mr. Buffman because they knew about his past record, and that he was going to be charged with First Offense Drunk Driving. This was **WRONG!!** They interviewed us that day and wanted to know our feelings about his charge of First Offense. After the airing of the news, we began receiving phone calls telling us, "Thank you for getting Mr. Buffman off of the road. They told us that they saw him driving drunk so many times, and sometimes with his children in the car. They were glad that he was in jail, **WHERE HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN AND NOT ON THE HIGHWAY ENDANGERING THE OTHER DRIVERS.** I received a phone call from a bus driver telling me, "Thank you for protecting the students on her bus," because she would see him driving drunk during the day. It is now eight months later and I just received a letter yesterday talking about Heidi's death. People stop me in town and ask if they can start a petition to support the new Legislation, they want to do whatever it takes to change the Statue of Limitations Law.

Our family has suffered greatly as a result of a drunk driving crash! A special needs brother no longer has the sister that he loved so much, that was his best friend and his best teacher. He does not have a sister that will look after him and care for him after both my husband and I have passed away. We didn't get to see our daughter experience all the activities of her senior year of high school. We will never have the chance to see her attend the University of Michigan, where she had already been offered a scholarship. It was her dream to attend that university, the one that her father and Grandpa attended. Our dreams of a beautiful wedding are gone and Dan and I will never have the opportunity to be called Grandma and Grandpa from Heidi's children. We will be missing out on an important part of a person's life. People like Mr. Buffman are a threat to our society. They should not be allowed to endanger our roads and cause heartache to other families.

I would like to thank you for allowing us to share how our life has changed because of one man's use of alcohol. We are so honored that Heidi has the opportunity to continue to care about her community and other people by creating a new law, "Heidi's Law."

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